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ABSTRACT

This paper provides an overview of the 4-day school week being utilized by 36 school districts in Colorado. These districts, which tend to be rural and sparsely populated, schedule 7.5 hours per day for 144 days of school instead of the normal 6 hours for 180 days. Colorado law requires school districts to schedule 1,080 hours per year of instructional time for secondary schools and 990 instructional hours for elementary schools. Fifteen districts have no Monday classes and 20 districts have no Friday classes. The law allowing for a 4-day week was passed in 1980, and its implementation proved popular with students, parents, and teachers. The initial reason for the change was financial; the shortened week saved substantial amounts in transportation, food costs, utilities, and staff expenditures. However, the truncated week presents possible problem areas, such as child care for the off days, the effects on instructional time, political concerns over a shortened school year, and how a 4-day week affects student performance. Reliable data on the last feature are yet to be determined. The 4-day week seems to meet a need for communities that are small and rural but may also prove useful for larger, urban areas. Contact information for superintendents of districts on the 4-day schedule are provided. (RJM)

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ED 429 344

The FOUR 4 DAY School Week

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The

FOUR DAY

School Week

Colorado Department of Education
201 East Colfax Avenue
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Revised - February 1999

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STATUS OF THE FOUR-DAY WEEK IN COLORADO

Thirty-six school districts, constituting 21% of the 176 school districts in Colorado, serving 1.8% of students, utilize the four-day week as the structure for organizing their school year. In simple terms, those districts schedule 7.5 hours per day for 144 days of school instead of the normal hours for 180 days.

This paper is intended as an overview of the practice. Actual practices differ from district to district. The reader is encouraged to contact individual districts if there is a desire for specific information.

DEFINITION

Colorado law requires school districts to schedule 1080 hours per year of instructional time for secondary schools and 990 instructional hours for elementary schools. The 1080 nours equate to six hours per day for 180 days. The 990 hours equate to five and one-half hours per day. Up to 24 hours may be counted for parent-teacher conferences, staff inservice programs, and closing for reasons of health, safety, or welfare of students.

The law also requires any district offering less than 160 days of school to obtain permission from the Commissioner of Education. One of the duties of local school boards is:

> C.R.S 22-32-109 (n) (I) *To determine, prior to the end of a school year, the length of time which the schools of the district shall be in session during the next following school year, but in no event shall said schools be scheduled to have less than one thousand eighty hours of planned teacher-pupil instruction and teacher-pupil contact during the school year for secondary school pupils in high school, middle school, or junior high school or less than nine hundred ninety hours of such instruction and contact for elementary school pupils or less than four-hundred-fifty hours of such instruction for a half-day kindergarten program. In no case shall a school be in session for fewer than one hundred sixty days without the specific prior approval of the commissioner of education.*

Districts scheduling a school year of 160 days or more need no state approval. Local boards of education annually establish district calendars, but there is no requirement to report or submit calendars to the Colorado Department of Education (CDE). During the-three year accreditation review cycle, accreditation consultants review school calendars and schedules to determine compliance with the number of required hours. Scheduling a school year of more than 160 days is at the discretion of local districts.

Many districts schedule adjusted or partial weeks for a variety of purposes. Some schedule four-days per week during the winter, but not all year. Others arrange to staff inservice days on a quarterly or monthly basis. Some have half-day inservices on a regular basis. There is complete flexibility for districts to schedule 160 or more days of instruction for a total of 1080 hours for the year.

The traditional instructional day has been six hours. Those districts on a strict four- day week normally hold classes for seven and one-half hours for 144 days per year. The total is still 1080 hours. Many districts exceed this total on a voluntary basis. Summer school, for example, is not counted in the annual hours since the requirement is that the schedule must serve all students.

Lunch, recess, passing time, study halls, before and after school programs...can they be counted as instructional time? It depends! The law says that local boards of education must schedule a minimum number of hours of teacher-pupil contact and teacher-pupil instruction for each school year. The specific hour requirements are found in Colorado Revised Statute 22-32-109. State Board Rule 1 CCR 301-12, amended in 1993, states that "Teacher-pupil contact and teacher-pupil instruction shall mean that time when a pupil is actively engaged in the 'educational process' shall be defined by the local school board."

CURRENT STATUS

During the 1991-92 school year, the Commissioner of Education approved the applications of 35 school districts to conduct less than 160 days of school. The total student enrollment of all 35 districts was approximately 10,000 students. During the 1992-93 school year, 37 school districts with a total population of 10,750 received approval to conduct less than 160 days of school.

Colorado is divided into 176 school districts with total enrollment of almost 600,000 students. The largest district with less than 160 days scheduled has more than 1,000 students. The smallest has 35 students K-12.

Districts utilizing the four-day week tend to be rural and sparsely populated. Many have great distances for students to travel with long bus routes. Many also have major distances to travel to athletic events, as they participate in differing sports, conferences, and leagues.

All four-day districts regularly conduct school on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. Fifteen districts conduct no Monday classes and 20 districts conduct no Friday classes.

HISTORY

In 1980, the Colorado legislature allowed districts to pilot alternative weekly schedules. Districts desiring to pilot the four-day week made application to CDE. The law specified several criteria which had to be addressed prior to approval. An annual report was required. In 1980, three districts were approved for a four-day week. By 1981, 12 districts had been approved.

In 1985, the Colorado legislature changed the required school year from 180 days to 1080 hours. For three years, local districts were no longer required to make application and receive approval for alternative calendars. No records of local district schedules, calendars, or of any alternative school calendars were kept by CDE.

In 1988, the legislature passed a provision that required any district scheduling less than 160 days of school to obtain permission from the Commissioner. In 1990, a formal application process was instituted by CDE.

For the 1990-91 school year, one additional district adopted a four-day week and one district returned to a five-day week for a total of 36 districts. For the 1991-92 school year, 35 school districts were approved to conduct a less than 160 day school year. This was one less district than the previous year because one district scheduled exactly 160 days. For the 1992-93 school year, 37 districts were approved.

IMPACT

The remainder of this paper consists of a former CDE employee's observations. These are based on extensive conversations with practitioners in four-day districts and visitations to most of those districts.

The specific characteristics of four-day week districts vary widely. A few do not have school on Monday, but most schools do not have school on Friday. Many have utilized the extra day for a variety of activities; some have not. Ivestigate specific situations; list is attached. The impact of the practice will be discussed under several topics.

POPULARITY

Among districts which have implemented the concept, the practice of the four-day week is very popular among students, parents, and teachers. Satisfaction surveys indicate that 80% - 90% of community members favor continuing the four-day week in districts which have been on the schedule for several years. The opposition seems to come from members of the community not directly associated with the school, and from those who feel that school employees should work a traditional week.

Districts moving toward a change from five-day to four-day weeks typically spend extensive time studying the issue, and seeking widespread community involvement and participation in the discussions. Many times visitations are made to other four-day week districts as part of the study. Even if the primary motivation is financial, careful attention is usually given to addressing questions and concerns of parents and teachers.

However, districts changing from the four-day week back to a five-day schedule usually have not engaged in extensive study and discussion. The decision has been made by the school board following an election which changed the board supporting the four-day week. The decision to go back has usually been greeted with much controversy and dissension. In one case, the board made a decision for a five-day week just prior to a board election. The old board was removed in the election and the new board reversed the decision and the district remained on the four-day week.

Reasons for popularity vary from district to district. Some reasons offered are as follows:

- more time for family and family activities,
- Friday teacher preparation time instead of weekend preparation, and
- a longer weekend break so that the intensity of the other days can be relieved.

FINANCIAL

The initial reasons for going from five to four days of school per week have generally been financial. Once again, the financial picture differs from district to district. However, there are several general trends which are reliable.

Transportation

Transportation costs can be reduced by about 20%. In order to realize that level of savings, districts must severely restrict or eliminate transportation for activities or programs not conducted on regular school days. The capital, insurance, maintenance, and administrative costs remain relatively constant. Fuel, oil, salaries, and supervisory costs can be reduced. Transportation employees will have a reduction in net pay.

Food Service

If districts are subsidizing the food service program from the general fund, 20% of that subsidy can be saved since the program runs only four days. Again, certain fixed costs are not reduced.

Utilities

If buildings are actually closed and placed on a weekend cycle, savings comparable to a three-day weekend can be realized. However, common practice is for buildings to be open for extra activities and for the use of staff. In most cases, heat is provided.

Staff

Most staff members are either on contract or on regular work weeks. Secretaries usually work 10 hour days with offices closed on the off-day. Teachers and administrators usually receive the same annual salary. Hourly employees tied directly to the school day, such as aides and paraprofessionals, may or may not work the same number of hours per week.

CHILD CARE

The issue of baby-sitting seems to be a wash. With the longer school day, students get home at approximately the same time as their parents. The latch-key issue is virtually non-existent on school days. The issue is the full day of child care needed on the fifth day. Most people have made the adjustment within neighborhoods or in other ways. With schools closed, more baby sitters are available. It does not seem more difficult to arrange for a single full day of baby sitting than for a couple of hours five days per week. In many cases a single day is simpler.

INSTRUCTION

The use of instructional time is probably the most controversial and least studied of all the issues. At the beginning, teachers clearly are faced with rearranging the instructional day. The major concern is for younger students and their ability to avoid fatigue.

When districts are strict about reducing interruptions of instructional time, the quality of that time can increase. The three-day weekend allows more flexibility for dealing with family and other conflicts which normally disrupt school. Appointments with doctors and dentists can be scheduled out of school time. Sometimes it takes all day to go to the dentist when a major drive is involved.

Some of the travel time associated with athletics and other activities occurs when school is not in session. A negative point is when a day of school is lost for any reason, it is a 20% longer day than a six-hour day, and, therefore, more hours are lost.

The general conclusion is that when strictly enforced, there are fewer disruptions to instructional time during the four-day week. Teachers, students, and parents are able to adapt to the longer day by planning

creatively for and pacing the delivery of instruction. This is true even for younger children.

There has been a concern expressed by some that certain students in need of more frequent reinforcement have trouble with continuity of learning with the three-day weekend. This matter has not been studied or documented.

POLITICAL

Colorado has a deeply ingrained tradition of local control. The general belief is that the best decisions are made by those at the grass roots level. This tradition led to the flexibility provided by the legislative decision requiring hours instead of days. That tradition is currently being questioned on a number of fronts. One of them is the use of time. There is a push in Colorado, as there is in the rest of the nation, for an increase in instructional time.

Even though the total number of instructional hours is the same, there is a negative reaction to the concept of 144 days of school. This is especially true for those pushing for a 200 day or longer school year. Colorado Governor Roy Romer and state legislators have questioned the four-day week concept.

Within local communities, the issue of four versus five days raises strong emotions. One board member indicated his brother would not speak to him because he voted to return to the five-day week. As with everything in education, opinions are strong and feelings run high.

STUDENT PERFORMANCE

The jury is out on the question of student performance. If performance is measured by standardized test scores, only one study has been completed comparing districts. It was conducted in the early 1980's by Colorado State University. The results were inconclusive, but were confounded by research conditions.

The general feeling is that students do no worse on the four-day week than on the traditional schedule. Any attempt to provide a definitive response faces the difficulty in statistically controlling all the variables involved. If student performance is judged by satisfaction, then the results are very favorable.

Few if any districts have changed from five to four days with the expressed purpose of improving student achievement. It has not been a significant issue.

An interesting side-effect is that when the financial crisis eased, programs were expanded. Many districts offer programs for gifted students, remedial programs, and disciplinary programs. Some districts run buses on regular

routes so that students will be able to come for the special programs. These activities are in addition to the basic instructional week.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The four-day week presents only one interesting method of utilizing time in ways other than the traditional. For many communities, it meets a need for efficiency. These communities tend to be small and rural in nature. Probably, these communities also have a larger percentage of traditional families with at least one parent not working outside the home. Many communities have a strong agricultural base with a tradition of family farms. There are potential implications beyond the rural setting. In the cities, school usually gets out around 2:30 or 3:00 p.m. If students stayed until 4:30, the latch-key problem could be reduced. The fifth day could then be used for family, recreational or community activities. In other words, the positive characteristics experienced by small districts might hold potential for larger districts as well.

There are good reasons why districts which originally changed to four days for financial reasons during the energy shortage periods have maintained the practice even though the crisis has passed. These reasons may have implications for restructuring not driven primarily by finance.

Even though a small percentage of students are enrolled in districts with a four-day week, almost a quarter of Colorado's school districts are on the plan. The practice clearly warrants a closer look as all schools are struggling to find new and innovative ways to meet the changing needs of today's students.

Contact:
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Regional Educational Services Unit
(303) 866-6633

SCHOOL DISTRICTS APPROVED
FOR LESS THEN 160 DAYS
1997-98 SCHOOL YEAR

	COUNTY	SCHOOL DISTRICT NAME	ENROLLMENT
1.	Baca	Pritchett Re-3	94
2.	Bent	Mc Clave Re-2	238
3.	Conejos	South Conejos	435
4.	Costilla	Sierra Grande R-30	313
5.	Crowley	Crowley County	603
6.	Custer	Custer C-1	412
7.	Dolores	Dove Creek Re-2J	311
8.	El Paso	Calhan RJ-1	432
9.	El Paso	Peyton 23	352
10	El Paso	Hanover 28	104
11.	El Paso	Edison 54 JT	35
12.	Elbert	Big Sandy 100J	319
13.	Elbert	Kiowa C-2	250
14.	Elbert	Elbert 200	188
15.	Fremont	Cotopaxi Re 32	283
16.	Gilpin	Gilpin County Re 1	342
17	Grand	East Grand 2	1,073
18.	Huerfano	Huerfano County Re 1	816
19.	Huerfano	La Veta Re 2	285
20.	Kiowa	Eads Re-1	295
21.	Kit Carson	Hi Plains R-23	118
22.	Las Animas	Primero R-2	166
23.	Las Animas	Hoehne R-3	325
24.	Las Animas	Branson R-82	55
25.	Las Animas	Kim R-88	82
26.	Lincoln	Karvel Re-23	93
27.	Logan	Frenchman Re-3	168
28.	Mineral	Creede C-1	103
29.	Morgan	Weldon Valley Re-20J	116
30.	Otero	Cheraw 31	219
31.	Park	Park County Re-2	456
32.	Rio Grande	Del Norte C-7	730
33.	Saguache	Mountain Valley Re-1	200
34.	Teller	Cripple Creek Re-1	448
35.	Washington	Lone Star 101	73
36.	Washington	Woodlin R104	123

FOUR-DAY WEEK SCHOOL DISTRICTS: 1997-1998

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